



National Park Service and Gettysburg Foundation proposal to amend the fee structure at the Gettysburg National Military Park Museum and Visitor Center, Gettysburg, Pennsylvania

Summary: The National Park Service (NPS) and the Gettysburg Foundation are considering collecting a single admission fee to all the venues at the Gettysburg National Military Park Museum and Visitor Center. The single admission charge would cover the museum exhibits, the “New Birth of Freedom” film, and the restored Cyclorama Painting. The fee would be collected by the Foundation, which is responsible for operations of the museum facility. Admission to the Visitor Center portion of the facility would remain free.

The proposed new “all-in-one fee” would allow members of the public to visit the museum galleries, see the film, “A New Birth of Freedom,” and experience the Cyclorama painting program with one ticket. The new ticket would allow the Foundation to lower its fees, creating a higher value for park visitors, and allowing visitors multiple opportunities to enjoy the venues during the day of their visit.

Background: Long-term agreements between the NPS and the Foundation required the Foundation to secure all funding required to design and construct the new Museum/Visitor Center facility for Gettysburg NMP. That objective of the partnership between the NPS and the Foundation has now been successfully accomplished. The new facility is solving long-term park problems associated with (1) preservation of the park's museum collections, (2) preservation and display of the 1884 Cyclorama painting, (3) provision of a museum complex to provide visitors with an understanding of the significance of the Battle of Gettysburg within the context of the causes and consequences of the American Civil War, and (4) removal of two outdated visitor facilities and rehabilitation of the historic battle landscapes upon which the buildings currently reside.

The partnership also calls for the Foundation to operate the Museum and Visitor Center on behalf of the NPS for twenty years, until September 2028 - at no cost to the NPS. In accordance with the agreement between the NPS and the Foundation, the Foundation has the authority to collect all revenues generated by operations of the new facility. Those revenues must be used in the following priority order:

- First, to pay down the long-term debt on the facility. The Foundation has obtained \$15 million in tax-free bonds to assist in the construction of the new Museum and Visitor Center. The bonds must be fully repaid at the end of the 20-year operating agreement between the Foundation and the NPS (September 2028).

- Second, to pay for all of the operating and maintenance expenses of the new Museum and Visitor Center over this twenty-year period. The Foundation is responsible for all operating costs of the facility, to include utilities, custodial services, building and equipment maintenance, and Foundation staff costs. The only NPS costs associated with the new facility are for NPS staff and staff support costs. This enables the NPS to redirect scarce funds that were previously used to operate and maintain the old visitor center and Cyclorama building, towards preservation of the park's historic resources and interpretive programs.
- Third, to establish a building and equipment reserve fund, and an exhibit reserve fund. Per agreement with the NPS, the Foundation is required to set aside funds from the operating revenues each year to establish reserve accounts for future equipment replacement and/or building repairs, for future rotation of artifacts and refreshment of museum exhibits. The reserve accounts are also required by the bank holding the tax-free bonds.
- Fourth, at the end of each operating year, to provide a donation to Gettysburg NMP and the NPS. Per agreement these donations are required to equal the amount that Gettysburg NMP and the NPS received from bookstore sales in the old visitor center. These funds are used by Gettysburg NMP for a variety of purposes, ranging from preservation of historic resources to hiring of seasonal rangers. The funds returned to the NPS will be used to support bookstore operations in other (smaller) parks that cannot generate enough sales to remain open to the public.
- If any revenues remain at the end of each fiscal year after satisfying the four obligations above, the NPS and the Foundation jointly determine their use, which could include paying down debt, land acquisition, and park preservation projects.

Revenues: The 1999 General Management Plan and the 2000 General Agreement between the NPS and the Foundation outlined three primary sources of revenues: the Museum Store, the Refreshment Saloon, and "Interpretive Venues" at the facility. Revenues from these sources must be sufficient to enable the Foundation to meet the financial obligations outlined above.

The 1999 General Management Plan and the 2000 General Agreement both anticipated that there would be three for-fee "Interpretive Venues" in the new facility, including the park's two existing fee programs, the Electric Map and the Cyclorama Programs:

- "The Electric Map...would be upgraded and modernized. It would continue to tell the story of the three-day battle, its tactics and actions. Its interpretation would be expanded to provide a better understanding of the context of the battle and the reasons for the tactics selected by the armies." (GMP, p. 90)

- “The Cyclorama painting would be displayed in a new gallery that would enhance its interpretation. A new program would describe the culmination of the Battle’s 3rd day, Pickett’s Charge. The painting would be a focal point for understanding both the battle and its continuing hold on the imagination of visitors. If possible, the diorama which was once part of the painting would be reconstructed to give visitors the sense of being in the battle intended by the painter. The experience would be developed to give visitors a sense for what it was like for participants and noncombatants during this final clash.” (GMP, p. 91) The completely restored Cyclorama Painting, including the three-dimensional diorama, will open on September 26, 2008.
- “A new film would round out the park’s interpretive program. The film and theater would provide an opportunity for visitors to learn about the battle. The film would replace the outdated park film shown currently by the park. The film would be displayed in the park theater, a multipurpose theater available both for showing the film and for other special films and events....There would be an interpretive fee for this program.” (GMP, p. 91)

During the design of the building and its exhibits, however, the NPS and the Foundation made the decision to reduce these for-fee interpretive venues from three to two. The NPS and Foundation are meeting the goal of telling “the story of the three-day battle, its tactics and actions” and expanding our interpretation “to provide a better understanding of the context of the battle and the reasons for the tactics selected by the armies” through the museum exhibits themselves, rather than “upgrading and modernizing the electric map.” There are three battle theaters in the museum exhibits, explaining in detail the troop movements and major battle actions of July 1, July 2, and July 3.

In addition, as we discovered, it was not economically feasible to consider relocating and upgrading the electric map. The map weighs over 12 tons, its electronic components are so obsolete that repair parts are no longer available, and it contains friable asbestos.

Operating Pro Forma

The Gettysburg Foundation’s annual budget contains three distinct program areas: the Museum/Visitor Center operating budget, the Membership Programs and Development budget, and Capital Campaign budget. Both the Membership Programs and Development and the Capital Campaign budgets are self-sufficient; i.e., neither of these activities draw upon revenues from the Museum/Visitor Center operating budget. In other words, revenues generated by the facility are devoted exclusively to the four obligations described above, and are not used to support either the Membership Programs and Development or the Capital Campaign budgets.

The 2008 operating budget for the Museum/Visitor Center depends upon three primary sources of revenues. On an annual basis, those revenues were projected as follows:

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| • Museum Store commissions | \$1,925,715 |
| • Food Service commissions | \$ 422,260 |
| • Film theaters and Cyclorama | \$4,813,724 |

To date, the Museum Store, operated by Event Network under contract to the Gettysburg Foundation, is performing ahead of projections. The Refreshment Saloon, operated by Aramark under contract to the Gettysburg Foundation, is performing slightly below projections. The film theaters, however, are operating well short of projections. On an annualized basis, the theaters are operating \$1,784,780 short of projections.

The current fee schedule for the theater is:

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| • Adult (ages 13+) | \$ 8 |
| • Adult group (16+ visitors) | \$ 7 |
| • Youth (ages 6-12) | \$ 4 |
| • Youth group (16+ visitors) | \$ 4 |

On September 26th, with the opening of the Cyclorama Program, the combined ticket prices for the film and Cyclorama are scheduled to increase to:

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| • Adult (ages 13+) | \$12 |
| • Adult group (16+ visitors) | \$10 |
| • Youth (ages 6-12) | \$ 7 |
| • Youth group (16+ visitors) | \$ 6 |

These prices were originally established by the Foundation and approved by the NPS, after extensive research, consultation with marketing experts, and a comparability analysis of similar or like attractions across the northeast and southeast United States. In fact, the prices originally established were significantly below the fees that the consultants told us that “the market could bear,” in our continuing effort to make the new Gettysburg experience as affordable to as many visitors as possible. The pro forma budget of the Foundation would be met if 33% of the visitors viewed the film.

Analysis

The April 2008 opening of the Museum was very successful, and total visitation to the facility has been strong, exceeding visitation at the former visitor center. Unfortunately, during the first four months of operation of the new facility, the percentage of visitors choosing to view the film has ranged from a low of 18% to a high of 24% - well below the percentages necessary to allow the Foundation to meet its financial obligations to the bank, for adequate operations and maintenance of the facility, to meet its reserve requirements, or to meet its donation requirements to the NPS.

The NPS and the Foundation have thoroughly analyzed these numbers, including both formal and informal feedback directly from visitors, and have consulted with the marketing experts. Based upon this analysis, we have come to several conclusions:

- Visitor feedback and word-of-mouth indicates that the museum experience – which is free - is so good that visitors feel little need to pay for the theater experience. Furthermore, all indications are that this will not change substantially after the opening of the Cyclorama program.
- Visitor feedback consistently tells us that \$8 for a 22-minute film – no matter how good the film is – is more than they were expecting or prepared to pay.
- Likewise, the same feedback indicates that \$12 will be more than future visitors are expecting or prepared to pay for the 45-minute combined theater and Cyclorama experience. We should expect a temporary spike of visitors desiring to see the restored Cyclorama, but that spike will not be enough to achieve the numbers required to meet budget goals.

The Foundation and the NPS have also experimented with several fee “enhancements,” such as packaging the theater and Licensed Battlefield Guide tours or tour tapes and CDs at one discounted price. Although these package “deals” have proven to be popular with visitors, the increase in package sales is still not enough to meet revenue goals.

The Proposal

After careful consideration, the NPS and the Gettysburg Foundation are now considering collecting a single admission fee to all the venues at the Gettysburg Museum and Visitor Center. The single fee would cover admission to the museum exhibits, the theater, and the restored Cyclorama Gallery. The proposed fee structure for the three combined venues would be significantly less than the current fee structure for the theater and Cyclorama programs:

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| • Adult (ages 13+) | \$ 7.50 |
| • Adult group (16+ visitors) | \$ 6.50 |
| • Youth (ages 6-12) | \$ 5.50 |
| • Youth group (16+ visitors) | \$ 5.00 |

By charging a single fee to all three venues, we think we could accomplish several major objectives:

- We would expect to substantially increase the percentage of visitors willing to pay the lower fee, thus improving the Foundation’s ability to meet its financial goals.
- We could make the single fee for all three venues substantially lower than the \$12 currently proposed for the theater and Cyclorama experience – thus creating a higher value for park visitors, by making the theater and Cyclorama experiences more affordable for more visitors.

- The single fee proposal would allow visitors multiple opportunities to enjoy the venues throughout their visit; i.e., those visitors who wished could attend the theater or the Cyclorama presentation a second time.

In order to accommodate the large numbers of repeat visitors to Gettysburg, a season pass providing unlimited admission to all three venues for a year would be available, for \$32 per person or \$63 per family. The season pass would include a complimentary membership in the Friends of Gettysburg.

Although this proposal increases the cost of a visit to Gettysburg NMP by those visitors who would not choose to experience either the theater or the Cyclorama program, it does provide the majority of our visitors with a better visitor experience, by making the theater and Cyclorama programs more affordable. In essence, the proposal spreads the burden of supporting the new facility across a wider percentage of park visitors.

Free Opportunities at Gettysburg NMP and the Museum/Visitor Center

This proposal does not affect numerous elements of a visit to Gettysburg National Military Park that are free for all visitors. The park does not have an entrance fee, so the entire battlefield is available for visitors to explore and enjoy at their leisure, at no charge.

In the new facility, there is no charge to enter and use the Visitor Center, the Refreshment Saloon, the Museum Store, the Theater and Museum Lobbies (which contain numerous exhibits), the Resource Room, or the Ford Motor Company Fund Education Center. There is no charge for parking while visiting the Museum and Visitor Center, or for the numerous NPS Ranger programs provided in the height of the visitor season. Students, scholars and visitors may still conduct research in the park's archival and museum collections, by appointment.

Public Comment

During the General Management Plan process and its public comment periods, neither the NPS nor the Foundation foresaw the need to charge a fee for admission to the museum in the new facility, since the economic feasibility studies commissioned during the GMP indicated that it would not be necessary. Consequently, the General Management Plan specifically states that "The museum, like the visitor center, would be free to all visitors..." (GMP, p. 90) Therefore, the NPS and the Foundation are releasing this proposal for a 30-day public comment period.

Opportunities to comment: During a thirty day comment period, ending September 29, 2008, the NPS will provide an opportunity for the public to comment in writing on this proposal. In addition, a public workshop has been scheduled for 7:00 pm, Thursday, September 18, at the Gettysburg Museum and Visitor Center, to present information and answer questions from the public.

How to comment: Interested members of the public may comment in writing to the Superintendent, Gettysburg National Military Park, 1195 Baltimore Pike, Suite 100, Gettysburg, PA 17325, or by email to GETT_Superintendent@nps.gov. **All comments must be received by September 29, 2008.**

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